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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 32nd MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Wednesday, 14 April 1999, at 10 a.m.

Chairperson: Ms. ANDERSON (Ireland)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

Special Dialogue on Children

1. The CHAIRPERSON said that the Special Dialogue on Children would provide the Commission with an opportunity to consider an issue of central concern: how to protect children's rights effectively. The year 1999 marked the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of Child. Although that .nstrument had achieved near-universal ratification, universal implementation was still a remote goal. The Commission must therefore seize that opportunity for dialogue and examine the challenges posed by the Convention.

2. She hoped that the debate would focus especially on those groups of children who were marginalized and excluded because they were invisible, or seen but ignored. The debate should also make it possible to examine the work being undertaken elsewhere with marginalized children, which might bear crucially on the work of the Commission.

3. The dialogue was informal, and must be interactive. It should at the same time be useful to Governments, enabling them to assess whether the Convention had been effectively integrated into their national policies; to the United Nations system, which should ask itself whether it had made rights of the child a true priority, and to non-governmental organizations (NGOs), which would have to consider whether their work was of primary benefit to those who were most vulnerable, namely, children. Lastly, questions would inevitably be raised concerning the effectiveness and scope of the Commission's work; .n particular, was it adequately addressing issues of marginalization?

4. Mrs. ROBINSON (United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights) said that the Special Dialogue, the second of its kind held by the Commission following the previous year's discussion of the human rights of women, demonstrated the Commission's resolve to find new solutions to extremely important questions.

5. The Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted 10 years previously, had proved to be a very effective tool for protecting the rights of children everywhere. However, in spite of the efforts of a number of United Nations bodies and specialized agencies, the outlook was bleak where respect for those rights was concerned. Children were the first victims of the economic crises that afflicted the world, and of the ensuing social dislocation and violence. They made up a significant percentage of the poor in developing and developed countries alike, and swelled the ranks of armies in many countries. There was a striking contrast between the way children actually lived and the high international standards that had been adopted for their benefit. It was to be hoped that the present discussion would enable Governments, international organs and the United Nations to make more explicit commitments in that area and to agree on methods of measuring progress.

6. Events in the world required a new focus on the rights of the child, and, in particular, the situation of those who had been marginalized by reason of their gender or because they belonged to a minority, who were victims of armed conflicts, exploited, sold into prostitution or excluded from society by extreme poverty.

7. Each of those cases constituted a violation of fundamental human rights. It was thus essential to integrate the human rights dimension into the decision-making processes of all bodies, mechanisms and procedures established by the United Nations system; no one would then be able to plead ignorance. In other words, it was of the utmost importance to assess the human rights implications of the marginalization and exclusion of children and to give fuller consideration to how the Commission, and also the Committee on the Rights of the Child and other human rights mechanisms, could effectively act to counter those phenomena. The dialogue should also provide an opportunity to consider how to transmit a sense of their responsibility for human rights to the other organs of international society and to those engaged in taking decisions at national level that affected the rights of the child.

8. Noting that one of the merits of the Convention had been its recognition of children's right to participate in decisions concerning them, she invited the Commission to reflect on the possibility of organizing a meeting, at its next session, between children from the various continents and members of the Commission.

9. Mr. SOMAVIA (Director-General of the International Labour Office - ILO) said that in international forums he had often stressed that addressing child labour was crucial for development, for social progress and for a more decent world. Child labour affected 250 million children worldwide. For millions, childhood was synonymous with economic and social marginalization and exclusion. In many regions of the world children were exploited, recruited into armed conflicts, or trafficked across borders to work as prostitutes. Such exploitation was not only cruel, but also a waste of human potential.

10. ILO surveys had shown that in some sectors up to 20 per cent of child workers were under the age of 10. The situation of the girl child was a matter for particular concern, as many of them were employed in the worst kinds of work and subjected to appalling working conditions.

11. Child labour was intrinsically linked to poverty, of which it was both a consequence and a cause. Poor families sent their children to work in order to increase household income, yet in reality child labour perpetuated poverty. Nor should it be forgotten that children were also exploited in the developed world.

12. ILO had highlighted the extremely complex nature of the phenomenon of child labour and had stressed the need to eliminate it progressively by attacking its root causes and providing lasting solutions for working children and their families. Very often, structural adjustment had resulted in cutbacks in public social services and a further informalization of the economy. Children were often the first to suffer in consequence, and every effort must be made to ensure that the necessary search for macroeconomic balance was not conducted at the expense of future generations.

13. Fortunately, world opinion had rallied to the cause, as was indicated by the universal acceptance of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the adoption in June 1998 of the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, which placed the elimination of child labour at the heart of ILO's development efforts. The problem could not, however, be resolved by laws alone. Their enforcement must be backed up by socio-economic policies and programmes that attacked the underlying causes of child labour, namely, the poverty of nations, the poverty of communities and the poverty of families.

14. That was why ILO was pursuing a three-pronged approach in its campaign against child labour, involving the establishment of a body of international conventions and recommendations to serve as a guide for legislative action, technical assistance through its International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC), and emphasis on development as the long-term stable solution.

15. Since 1919 ILO had worked to develop international standards on child labour. The ILO Minimum Age Convention (No. 138), adopted in 1973, had been of considerable importance. Currently, the international community envisaged adopting new standards on the worst forms of child labour. Those standards, which had first been discussed at the International Labour Conference in June 1998, were to be adopted in Geneva in June 1999. The worst forms of child labour comprised slavery and slavery-like practices, child prostitution, the use of children for pornographic or other illicit activities, and all work which was likely to jeopardize their health, safety or morals.

16. The IPEC Programme, established in 1992, was the world's premier technical cooperation programme on child labour. More than 60 countries on four continents were participants, and it included more than 1,000 action programmes.

17. The third dimension of ILO's approach was development. The international community must do more and better in that area, for whenever international aid diminished, whenever the foreign debt problem was not dealt with, whenever crises and structural adjustments led to adult unemployment and protectionism persisted, children were affected.

18. There was now a chance for a decisive breakthrough in the struggle against child labour. He proposed the following measures: to establish programmes of action to progressively eliminate child labour; to adopt and quickly ratify a new convention to eliminate the worst forms of child labour, and allocate resources for that purpose; to devote special attention to the very young, and especially the girl child; to give primacy to preventive measures; to remove children from all hazardous work; to establish universal jurisdiction over crimes committed against children anywhere in the world; and to expand development capacities and promote a sustained attack against world poverty.

19. Mr. LEWIS (Deputy Executive Director, United Nations Children's Fund - UNICEF) said that perversity was a sad phenomenon of contemporary political life: it was possible to love children while totally disregarding their

greatest needs. The proposal by the High Commissioner for Human Rights, that children from all over the world should meet with members of the Commission, was in that respect an attractive one.

20. Marginalization had many facets: 12 million children under the age of 5 died annually from preventable diseases; 250 million were employed in child labour; 130 million, mostly girls, did not go to school and were exploited; 300,000 were forcibly conscripted into combat, while millions more were victims of civil conflict in Cambodia, Angola, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Somalia, Afghanistan, the Sudan, Rwanda and, most recently, Kosovo. To that litany of horror must now be added the millions of children who had died or would die of HIV/AIDS, or who would be orphaned as a result of that disease.

21. The rights of the child must become a centrepiece of every United Nations Development Assistance Framework initiative and reform proposal. The rights of the child must be considered by the Security Council on a regular basis and must be part of the training of every peacekeeping venture. The rights of the child should be on the lips of everyone from the Secretary-General of the United Nations to his most junior surrogate. A way must also be found of integrating the findings of the Committee on the Rights of the Child more fully into the policies of Governments, the work plans of the specialized agencies and the agendas of the treaty-monitoring bodies.

22. The Commission was faced with a flood of reports by special rapporteurs, special representatives, working groups and human rights defenders; but how many of them referred specifically to children? That, too, was an indication of the marginalization of children.

23. In that area as in others, political will played an essential role: it was a matter of choices. The next 10 years must be a time for implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and must mark the end of social and economic exclusion. Then and then alone would the twenty-first century belong to children.

24. Mr. TULLOCH (Director, Child and Adolescent Health and Development, World Health Organization - WHO) said that WHO echoed the call of UNICEF for States parties to honour the commitments they had made when ratifying the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

25. More than 10 million children still died each year from diseases and malnutrition, although most of those deaths could be prevented with modest resources. Adolescents were not spared: more than 1 million lost their lives each year through violence, suicide, accidents, pregnancy-related complications and preventable or treatable illnesses. Every year more than one and a half million young people became infected with HIV, and some 30 million started using tobacco, thereby jeopardizing their future health.

26. There was thus an urgent need to put the basic right of young people to health and health care more prominently on the agenda. WHO had committed itself to doing so. In its work and in its cooperation with United Nations organs it was striving to achieve a better linkage between the human rights dimension and child and adolescent health issues. To that end, it was working

with the Committee on the Rights of the Child to develop a commonly agreed set of health indicators, in order to enable States to deal more extensively with health questions in the reports they submitted to the Committee.

27. Another crucial field in which WHO could play an important role was the training of health professionals in child rights and the provision of assistance to States to enable them to bring their legislation into line with the principles of the Convention.

28. In concluding, he stressed that while the knowledge and tools to realize children's health rights were available, the large number of deaths of children each year was clear evidence of a lack of political will to guarantee those rights.

29. Ms. ASKERLÖF (Secretary-General, Save the Children (Sweden)) said that macroeconomic policies - including budgetary, monetary, trade, employment, exchange rate, debt and external aid policies - had very important direct or indirect consequences for children, although those consequences differed according to circumstances. Macroeconomic policy implications for children must thus be addressed as early and comprehensively as possible, and the rights of children must be integrated into the decision-making process in national and international forums.

30. However, despite the fact that children made up 37 per cent of the world's population, the child rights perspective was generally not visible in macroeconomic policy-making. Such policies were never child-neutral; they even tended to ignore children or to be biased in favour of adults. In order to make the links between macroeconomic policies and children's rights visible, there was an urgent need to undertake further analyses, on which decision-makers should then base themselves.

31. She called on all parties present to increase their cooperation in that area and to make constructive proposals. The mechanisms of the Commission could prove very useful in that regard, and the Commission should urge them to integrate children's rights more fully into their work. It should also prepare a report, along the lines of the one it had produced on women's rights, concerning children's rights, economic resources, the elimination of poverty and economic development, for submission at its next session.

32. Moreover, Governments should precisely ascertain the real effects of their budget allocations on children's rights and they should identify how their development aid cooperation was being used to implement the Convention. Governments should also integrate children's rights into their macroeconomic policies, a process which would often require increased cooperation between different departments. Lastly, they could play a crucial role in ensuring that the situation of children was taken into account in international bodies in which they were represented.

33. NGOs were already working, individually or in collaboration with one another and with Governments, United Nations bodies and the international financial institutions, to link macroeconomic policies and children's issues.

That cooperation needed to be intensified. The Convention on the Rights of the Child must play an essential role as a frame of reference when producing analyses, policies and decisions.

34. The CHAIRPERSON thanked the speakers for their valuable contributions and invited other participants to take the floor.

35. Mr. LABBE (Chile) said that, as Mr. Somavia had recalled in his statement, all the ills that children suffered were the result of poverty, which could only be eradicated through development. It was the responsibility of each country to ensure that development. Hence the importance of realistic, practical policies to benefit children. It was essential that the Commission should place emphasis on the concept of good governance throughout its proceedings.

36. Mr. Somavia had commented that children were affected whenever the free flow of trade was disrupted. The developing countries therefore called upon the developed countries to eliminate tariffs and other barriers to the free flow of trade, and demanded the full implementation of all the agreements concluded in the Uruguay Round of trade negotiations.

37. With regard to the draft optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, Chile reiterated that the concept of sale of children was not confined to the sale of children for purposes of sexual exploitation. In that respect he appealed to countries, and in particular to States Members of the European Union, to adopt a broader definition of the concept. Lastly, he welcomed the initiative taken by ILO to draft a convention to eliminate the worst forms of child labour.

38. Ms. ROTH (Germany) said that she was participating in the debate as a representative not of the Government of Germany but of that country's recently established Human Rights Committee. That Committee had set itself the task of establishing a solid basis for the effective implementation of individual rights, particularly children's rights. Before one denounced violations of those rights in other countries, one should look at violations taking place in one's own country. In Germany too, although it was one of the world's richest countries, the rights of the child were being violated: there were underprivileged and marginalized children, particularly where education and health were concerned. The task was to ensure equal opportunities of access to prosperity: to work for children was to invest in the future.

39. Referring to the situation of refugee children in Kosovo, she stressed the need to ensure that those children not only survived, but also regained their dignity, were able to attend school, and to live in a climate of tolerance, protected from hatred and violence. In concluding, she expressed the hope that the Convention would not remain a dead letter and that countries, starting with Germany, would implement it without reservations.

40. Mr. SIMKHADA (Nepal), referring to Mahatma Gandhi's remark that real change in society started with children, supported the proposal by the High Commissioner for Human Rights that the Commission should invite children to participate in its next session. Recent decades had been marked by terrible

events, but also by remarkable technical progress and a new awareness of the immensity of human potential. The conferences, summit meetings and declarations of the 1980s had constituted progressive stages in the process of combining that technical progress and immense human potential and using them to bring about a peaceful transformation of the world. It was now time to prepare for the twenty-first century, by adopting a new approach to economic and social problems.

41. Although a marked fall in infant mortality had been one of the most encouraging statistics relating to children in recent decades, that trend was in danger of being completely reversed, inter alia, by the spread of the AIDS pandemic. Not enough attention was given to that serious problem. In that connection he noted that, as the representative of UNICEF had pointed out, the resources allocated to combating diseases such as malaria, and to health care generally, remained negligible.

42. Lastly, while remarkable work was undoubtedly being done by NGOs to support children, he did not see why it should not be integrated more fully into government objectives.

43. Mr. KUNADI (India) welcomed the holistic approach that the Executive Director of UNICEF had adopted to the work of that organization. While there was a compelling need to focus on protecting children from particularly abhorrent violations of their rights, it was important not to neglect the far greater numbers of children who were deprived of the right to develop physically, mentally and socially on account of poverty, disease, illiteracy, malnutrition and other symptoms of underdevelopment. Development thus played an essential role in the promotion and protection of children's rights.

44. With regard to children affected by armed conflicts, it was important to offer them, not only after but also during conflicts, possibilities for education and training, if possible in situ, but, failing that, in safer neighbourhoods.

45. Child labour must be eradicated, but the goals pursued in that area must be realistic. In developing countries, the causes of that phenomenon - chiefly poverty and parental unemployment and illiteracy - could not be eliminated overnight, even with the best will in the world. Precipitate action in that area sometimes had worse consequences for children than failure to act. The only way forward was the progressive elimination of child labour, starting with its worst forms, while promoting development, poverty eradication and the implementation of social programmes.

46. Mr. HAMMARBERG (Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Cambodia), referring to the draft convention to eliminate the worst forms of child labour, which ILO was proposing to submit to States for approval, recommended that the instrument be drafted in such a way that all States could adopt it without difficulty. Furthermore, he made an appeal to the United States of America to give consideration to ratifying the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

47. The Committee on the Rights of the Child had taken an interesting initiative, which consisted of drawing up a checklist of measures Governments

were supposed to take. They were as follows: bringing domestic legislation into line with the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child; setting in place administrative structures enabling the Convention to be effectively implemented; establishing an independent body to monitor its implementation; drawing up statistics on the situation of children; examining the impact of their decisions in budgetary terms on the situation of children; and finally making sure that a dialogue was established between donor and recipient countries on the question of how aid could be channelled so as to be of prime benefit to children. He recommended that the agencies of the United Nations, and particularly UNICEF, ILO and WHO, take the checklist into account and integrate it into their own fields of activity.

48. Lastly, he said he attached very great importance to the participation of children, so that he considered Mrs. Robinson's suggestion particularly useful.

49. Mr. BAFRUEL DE LAGENEST (Franciscans International) drew attention to the exploitation of children in Brazilian society. Child prostitution was a phenomenon that was rampant in all regions of the country. In the north of Brazil, young and adolescent girls had gold and diamond diggers for clients. Laws had been passed to put an end to paedophile tourism in hotels in the major ports of the region, but it was a practice that persisted in a more or less discreet form throughout the country. In the centre and south of Brazil, it was the street children who were the victims of sexual exploitation or were used by drug traffickers. Child disappearances were also a frequent phenomenon in Brazil. In São Paulo in the past three years only 98 of the 377 children reported missing by their parents had been found. Unfortunately the Federal Government had not yet made the struggle against child exploitation one of its priority objectives. The funds allocated to the struggle against the commercial exploitation of children and adolescents needed to be increased, and distributed under supervision to institutions attempting to deal with the situation.

50. Ms. PLUMMER (Committee of NGOs Against Racism and Racial Discrimination) pointed out that racism and xenophobia often went hand in hand with poverty, and placed children in a particularly vulnerable situation. She appealed to all States to become aware of the fact. In that regard the forthcoming World Conference on Racism, which was to take place in 2001, should devote particular attention to the manner in which racism, racial discrimination and xenophobia affected children.

51. Ms. McVEY (Canada) considered that it was right to highlight poverty when referring to the situation of the millions of marginalized children in the world. It was very important to give consideration to programmes especially aimed at taking charge of children who were unreachable by normal assistance. Turning to the spokesman for ILO, she said she would like to know what progress had been made with the organization's research on the impact of voluntary codes of conduct for business practices aimed at eliminating child labour.

52. She would also like to know whether children were vaccinated during armed conflicts. She could well imagine that in the absence of a ceasefire such a task would be difficult if not impossible.

53. Ms. DUPUY (Uruguay) said that most speakers had emphasized the role of socio-economic factors in the marginalization and exclusion to which so many children in the world were condemned. The informal dialogue which had been embarked upon had in fact once again underlined the interdependence of all human rights.

54. Uruguay attached particular importance to the right to education, and she emphasized in that regard how much education could contribute to improving the lot of girls, especially in preparing them for a better life. She gave a brief account of the progress made by her country in that area.

55. As for child labour, even if States made a moral commitment to eliminating the scourge, it was still only a gradual process. Intervention in the form of sanctions would not be the appropriate response.

56. Finally, as regards foreign debt, which had also been pinpointed as one of the direct causes of poverty, she proposed that the interest on that debt serve to finance activities aimed at improving the lot of children.

57. Mrs. ROBINSON (United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights) considered that the check list of recommendations referred to by Mr. Hammarberg was useful.

58. Mr. LEWIS (United Nations Children's Fund), replying to an observation made by the representative of Canada, said that UNICEF had included in its programme the vaccination of children during armed conflict. In fact at that very moment in Kukes, Albania, UNICEF was undertaking a vaccination campaign. It hoped that the Congo would authorize it to do likewise.

59. He also underlined the real humanitarian catastrophe represented by the HIV/AIDS pandemic in Africa. The progress made in that region of the world in terms of child health had been completely wiped out by the pandemic, which had led to a considerable increase in infant mortality rates. By the year 2010 the disease would have made orphans of 40 million children. The contrast between the immense resources the developed countries were devoting to the struggle against the disease and the scanty means at the disposal of the developing countries was intolerable.

60. He agreed with the analysis made by previous speakers regarding the role of macroeconomic factors and foreign debt in the impoverishment of countries. They were aggravating factors, but so were the falling price of primary products for export and globalization.

61. Mr. ASSEFA BEQUELE (International Labour Organization), replying to a question by the representative of Canada, said that programmes intended to eliminate child labour had to be based on the following principles: they must be drawn up according to the specific situation of the country concerned and implemented in partnership with a number of actors; and they must be undertaken on a sustainable basis and, as the observer from the Save the Children organization had emphasized, take account of macroeconomic factors and the need to reduce poverty. Partnership played a crucial role in such programmes. If success had been achieved in Bangladesh in eliminating child labour in the textile industry, it was chiefly because it had been done in

cooperation with many partners. The efforts made in Pakistan, particularly to end the involvement of children in the manufacture of footballs, followed the same principle.

62. Mr. TULLOCH (World Health Organization), referring to what had been said about the AIDS pandemic, observed that an enormous effort must be made in the area of information. It was essential to provide children and adolescents with more information about the measures they should take to protect their health. Programmes must be devised that would meet that objective.

63. Ms. ASKERLÖF (Save the Children) acknowledged that, as some speakers had already noted, action by NGOs was sometimes limited, but their small size was also their strength, for NGOs were free. They worked directly with children. In other words, they had very concrete experience of the problem. They were aware of the links that existed between macroeconomic factors and the situation of children, and wanted to make the other actors aware of it too. In particular, they wanted to help Governments devise their policies, especially with regard to structural adjustment, taking account of the need above all to secure the well-being of children.

64. Mr. KANAVIN (Norway), referring to the suggestion by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights that children and adolescents be invited to participate in the Commission's debates, said that his country was ready to follow up that idea. Considerable preparatory work would be necessary, and the question should also be asked as to whether adults were really ready to listen to children. As a young man, he had chaired a council of children's representatives and remembered from his own experience that adults all too often had a tendency to put their own interests before those of young people.

65. Ms. JAHAN (Bangladesh) said that poverty was still the principal cause of the exclusion and marginalization suffered by children in Bangladesh and other countries in the world. Hunger, lack of shelter, disease and despair were all evils rooted in poverty. Poverty also existed in rich societies. The situation was all the more depressing because the problem of poverty could be solved at a very modest cost, as both UNICEF and WHO had repeatedly stated. What was lacking was the determination to do so.

66. She also drew attention to other factors which contributed to making the lot of children worse. She mentioned in particular the decline in social values in many countries, including the developed world, violence in the media and the use of the Internet for pornographic purposes, as well as racism and racial discrimination. Lastly, there was the exploitation of child labour. In that regard, she said that Bangladesh had abolished child labour, but that her country still had a great deal to do before the situation was completely satisfactory in that area.

67. Mr. BHATTI (Pakistan) said that he was shocked by the statistics which had been provided on the situation of children in the world. In view of the increase in the mortality rates of children under the age of five, there were very few countries in some regions of the world, like sub-Sarahan Africa or south Asia, that would achieve the objectives set at the beginning of the 1990s. Although children were mankind's future, 130 million of them did not attend school. The reason for that state of affairs was poverty, which in

turn was linked to the servicing of foreign debt. Some countries were spending up to 70 per cent of their budgets to service foreign debt, as a result of which they no longer had any resources left to allocate to social services, whether education or health.

68. Mr. TABACARU (Romania), basing his remarks on the experience of his own country, said that consideration of questions relating to children must include the participation of local organizations. In particular, assistance must be given to civil organizations operating on the ground. Also, it would be worth preparing a set of indicators to monitor the situation of children.

69. Mr. HAMZA (International Human Rights Law Group) drew attention to the question of the definition of a child, in other words, of the age at which an individual was no longer considered to be a child. Countries such as Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Uganda and the United States of America all had different legislation in that respect. That gave rise to various forms of discrimination, particularly in areas such as employment, the application of the death penalty and recruitment for armed conflict. He asked the Commission to look into the matter.

70. Ms. SCHELL (International Save the Children Alliance) said that one way of marginalizing children was not to take them into account in macroeconomic policies. She cited an ILO document in which the organization stressed that the adoption of rational macroeconomic policies was of crucial importance in improving the welfare of children. She would like to know how ILO took account of such macroeconomic policies.

71. Mr. STROHAL (Austria), noting the gap that existed between standards and practice, underlined the need to strengthen the links between the Committee on the Rights of the Child and the various bodies of the United Nations system. In 1998, Austria had supported an initiative concerning a particular aspect of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, namely juvenile justice. A coordination meeting had taken place in Vienna in which bodies of the United Nations system and other actors had participated. He wondered whether that initiative might serve as a model for following up implementation of the other provisions of the Convention.

72. Mr. HUSSAIN (Iraq) made the point that the Commission was studying the question of the lot of children in the world at a time when in Iraq more than a million children were dying every year and more than 3 million were suffering hardship because of the embargo imposed on that country. Every seven minutes an Iraqi child died because of the embargo, while others fell victim to cancers caused by the depleted uranium which the United States of America and the United Kingdom had used during the Gulf war. That situation had to be changed. He appealed to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to assume its humanitarian responsibilities. The fate of Iraqi children was deserving of its attention, as well as of the attention of the Commission on Human Rights. A decision on the part of the Commission had been anxiously awaited since 1990.

73. Mrs. RUBIN (United States of America) shared the views expressed by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and said she was convinced that the twenty-first century would belong to children. She recalled the

commitments undertaken by the United States Government, particularly in the field of education with the granting of study bursaries, in the field of health through research programmes on various diseases, and in social terms through family reunification programmes for refugee and displaced children. As for AIDS, the United States was doing a great deal of work on prevention by using the "Voice of America" to broadcast information and educational material concerning the disease.

74. Ms. DANAILOV (Observer for Switzerland) stressed the need to involve intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, international financial institutions, multinational companies and, of course, the children themselves together in the process of implementing the Convention on the Rights of the Child, in conformity with article 12 of the Convention.

75. The development of standards was also of great importance, particularly with regard to the participation of children in armed conflict, the economic and sexual exploitation of children and child labour. Research carried out on the causes of the marginalization of children must include precise statistics based on their social, ethnic and religious origins. Finally, it was worth restating that there were indissociable links between the rights of women and the rights of children.

76. Mr. GRABER (Defence for Children International) said that the considerable progress made in the past 20 years in the area of protecting children and the recognition of the greater role they must play in society were illustrations of the international community's capacity to turn principles into reality. Hailing the suggestion made by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to the effect that children might participate in the next session of the Commission, he proposed that all the actors concerned - Governments, civil society and the private sector - should step up their activities to give effect to the measures on behalf of children envisaged by the Secretary-General of the United Nations.

77. Ms. BLOEM (World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Church Women), speaking on behalf of the NGOs participating in the Working Group on Girls, said that in many countries girls were relegated to secondary status, and that laid them open to all sorts of violence. The cause of the violence, which was increasing considerably in scale, was often cultural in origin. In that respect, the initiative taken by the Commission on the Status of Women to invite girls between the ages of 13 and 18 to describe their experiences seemed to her to be an important contribution to consideration of the question.

78. Mr. YAMAZAKI (Japan) said that while, as the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights had emphasized, it was important to evaluate the progress already made in the area of the rights of the child, it was just as important to define clear objectives. At the Second Tokyo International Conference on African Development, a precise objective had been set to bring infant mortality in Africa down to one third of the level it had been at in 1990. He proposed that an International Children's Day be declared, on the lines of International Women's Day.

79. Ms. VON HEIDENSTAM (Observer for Sweden) said that since financial constraints were imposing a choice of budgetary priorities in all countries, the extent to which the rights of the child were achieved depended on political will. Many studies of the marginalization and exclusion of children had shown that the problem had to be viewed simultaneously from a long-term socio-economic point of view and in the light of specific short-term issues. The Swedish Parliament had just approved a political strategy for implementing the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which included legislative, budgetary and educational components. At the international level, the objective all Governments must pursue was the preparation of the World Summit on Children in 2001.

80. Ms. GEELS (Observer for New Zealand) said that her delegation noted the proposal made by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights regarding the participation of children in the next session of the Commission. She supported Mr. Hammarberg's suggestion with regard to mainstreaming implementation of the Convention of the Rights of the Child in all mechanisms of the Commission and bodies of the United Nations system. All the parties involved in the process of drawing up the draft ILO convention on eliminating the worst forms of child labour must, as had already been suggested, cooperate effectively. Lastly, Governments must show the necessary political will so that the fundamental principles contained in the Convention, namely the best interests of the child and children's right to express their views freely on all matters affecting them, could be effectively applied.

81. Ms. NAIKER (South Africa) drew the Commission's attention to the tragic fate of children with HIV/AIDS, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, and welcomed the decision of the Committee on the Rights of the Child to include the question on its list of items to be considered as priorities. The specialized institutions, Governments and NGOs must strengthen their collaboration in order to combat the scourge, particularly by means of education campaigns in rural areas.

82. Ms. GLOVER (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland) said that the attention given to the economic, social and cultural rights of children must not cause one to forget the importance of their civil and political rights. Throughout the world children were victims of odious violations in armed conflicts (rape, torture and extrajudicial executions). It was absolutely essential that such situations be followed up since they did not necessarily fall within the purview of existing mechanisms. In order that the situation of children in the world should improve, all the mechanisms established by the Commission, particularly those dealing with civil and political rights, must concern themselves above all with protecting the rights of children.

83. Mr. NASCIMENTO PEDRO (Observer for Brazil) said that his country actively participated at the international level in activities to promote and protect the rights of the child. His delegation fully subscribed to the views expressed by the representative of UNICEF and to the suggestions made by the observer for the Save the Children organization. On the other hand, the Brazilian delegation deplored the fact that the observer for Franciscans International had given such an unbalanced view of the situation of children

in Brazil. Local NGOs should be heard in that kind of debate, so as to obtain an accurate picture of the situation as it really was in the countries concerned and to deal with the problems in a constructive manner.

84. Ms. MOURAVIEFF-APOSTOL (International Federation of Social Workers) underlined the fact that handicapped children undoubtedly suffered most from marginalization and social exclusion. She wished to know whether the Director-General of ILO would be prepared to consider, along with the members of his organization, the possibility of including lack of access to education - both formal and informal - as one of the worst forms of child labour. She then exhorted all members and observers of the Commission to assist families, and particularly the most disadvantaged families, in their countries, by encouraging the adoption of appropriate budgetary and macroeconomic measures.

85. Mrs. SANTOS PAIS (United Nations Children's Fund) said she hoped that the special dialogue which was drawing to a close would guide the Commission in its future work. The question of the rights of children and their implementation and follow-up must also occupy a central place in each country's programmes of action. For its part, the international community must ask itself questions as to its genuine desire not only to have children participating in certain international fora but also to take their suggestions into account in practice. Finally, consideration should be given to the specific opportunities for continuing the dialogue in the longer term, beyond the world summit on children in the year 2001.

86. Mr. ASSEFA BEQUELE (International Labour Organization) said that ILO had studied the impact of macroeconomic policies on child labour and had embarked on a dialogue with the international financial institutions, recommending that they include the abolition of child labour in the economic prescriptions they were drawing up for countries. The World Bank had already taken that recommendation into account in its programmes. As for the draft convention on eliminating the worst forms of child labour, ILO's ultimate objective was certainly to eliminate child labour in all its forms. However, the first step was to tackle abolition of the most unacceptable forms. The question of the right to education had indeed been taken into account when the draft convention had been discussed. Some participants had stated that there was a risk that including such a right would lessen the impact of the draft convention, so it had been decided to continue discussions of the subject at the next International Labour Conference.

87. Mr. TULLOCH (World Health Organization) said that WHO was endeavouring with its member States to draw up specific directives to improve the health situation of children. It was trying, in particular, to help countries develop the necessary capacities. The fight against certain diseases and the use of tobacco, which had been mentioned by one speaker, was occupying all its attention. Finally, with regard to the idea of admitting children to participate in international fora, WHO knew from experience that lengthy preparatory work would be necessary before it was fully accepted by States.

88. Ms. ASKERLÖF (Save the Children) said that in some countries acceptance of NGOs still posed problems, for reasons that were essentially political.

She thanked the Chairperson of the Commission for having organized the dialogue. Cooperation between NGOs, Governments and international organizations was vitally important.

89. The CHAIRPERSON thanked all who had taken part in the debate and singled out one of the key ideas put forward, namely the need to approach the rights of the child from the macroeconomic point of view, to evaluate the impact on children of policies implemented at international and national levels, to intensify cooperation between the mechanisms involved and to include the rights of the child in all activities of the Commission and its mechanisms.

The meeting rose at 1.20 p.m.